DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 448 EA 029 708

AUTHOR Holmes, Julie A.
TITLE Sabbatical Leave: A Case Study of Professional Growth and Development.
PUB DATE 1998-11-00
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (27th, New Orleans, LA, November 4-6, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; Personal Narratives; *Sabbatical Leaves

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the results of a case study of a 6-month sabbatical taken to complete a master's degree program. It reports the case of a practicing elementary school teacher with 9 years of teaching experience. This intrinsic, reflexive case study was undertaken to help the participant better understand the meaning and effect of the sabbatical experience. Data were collected by means of reflective journals and a review of documents. A peer debriefer was utilized to ensure credibility, conformability, and dependability of data collected in this qualitative research design. The paper explores the professional growth and development that resulted from the sabbatical: learning from peers, presenting topics of study to peers and other adults, providing for individual differences of students, using technology, and providing performance and alternative assessments. The report lists the difficulties and frustrations of returning to the classroom following a sabbatical. The paper concludes with the positive effects of the sabbatical on the case study. These effects include an increase in knowledge of various teachers' methods and practices, an improvement in skills to deal with an array of teaching styles, a broadening of commitment to education, and a heightening of flexibility and adaptability in management. (RJM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 428 448

SABBATICAL LEAVE:

A CASE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Julie A. Holmes

Louisiana Tech University

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting
Of the Mid South Educational Research Association

New Orleans, Louisiana
November 4, 1998

EA 029 708

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Holmes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Sabbatical Leave: A Case Study

The term "sabbatical" can be defined by several distinguishing characteristics. A sabbatical is a planned leave of absence that teachers can qualify for after a certain number of years of continual service. This leave of absence is for the purpose of giving teachers the chance for self-improvement through professional growth and development. The teacher is usually fully or partially compensated during the sabbatical and is required to return to teaching and must file a report of his/her activities during the leave (Sima, 1995).

Attitudes Toward Sabbaticals

The topic of sabbatical leave can bring about a vast array of responses throughout the educational community. Ask most teachers and they will willingly respond that a sabbatical leave is one of the best commodities available to them for differing reasons, such as growth , development, change, and improvement. A review of the literature on sabbatical leave supports this claim. Oromaner (1994) writes of how sabbatical leave was part of a staff development initiative at Hudson Community College. A doctoral candidate whom received a sabbatical leave to complete comprehensive exams and to develop her dissertation proposal valued the leave time as an opportunity for professional renewal, as well as a chance to grow and improve her skills which would translate into benefits for her students and her school. Sabbatical

leave is also seen as an effective way for teachers to remain current in their field of specialty (Giroux & Mezei, 1990). This could be accomplished by returning to the community to work in a related business or industry, returning to college for further academic or technical study, or being given a reduced workload in order to improve teaching practices. Hawes (1988) states that "teachers possess great knowledge of the needs of students and schools, but have little extra time in which to make contributions to reform outside of their own classrooms" (p.4). Sabbatical leave gives teachers the opportunity to contribute time to do needed school and curriculum projects, or to pursue continuing education.

Principals, administrators, and the general public have mixed feelings about sabbatical leaves. Most principals and administrators are positive about the outcomes produced from leave time (Hawes, 1988). Participants return to their positions with a refreshed and renewed sense of enthusiasm for teaching. Teachers are able to create projects using new technologies, and organize special lab experiences and field trips to benefit their students. Some administrators and principals find sabbaticals difficult to deal with since they must find suitable replacements for those teachers on leave. According to Nassau (1995) administrators also hesitate to grant sabbaticals for fear that teachers will leave the district for other responsibilities. Nassau also states that the general public, as well as school personnel, are sometimes confused as to the meaning of the term sabbatical. Since the name suggests a Sabbath-like period of rest, taxpayers

place harsh judgement against sabbaticals because of the expense involved and usually support putting them first on the list of budget cuts.

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of an intrinsic case study of a six-month sabbatical taken to complete a Master's Degree program. The author (case) is a practicing elementary school teacher with nine years of teaching experience. This intrinsic, reflexive case study was undertaken in an attempt to better understand the meaning and effect of the sabbatical experience to the participant. The study was conducted because of the intrinsic interest in the meaning of the sabbatical experience (Stake, 1994).

Data were collected by means of reflective journals and a review of documents. A peer debriefer was utilized to help ensure credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the data collected in this qualitative research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A reflective review of data was utilized to determine the major themes regarding professional growth and development opportunities, and the experiences that emerged from the data.

Major Professional Growth and Development Themes

Several major themes emerged as contributing factors to the professional growth and development during the six month sabbatical. Each of the following sections describes an important aspect of the sabbatical experience.

Learning From Peers

One of the most integral aspects of the sabbatical was the continual opportunity to learn from peers. While teaching full time prior to the sabbatical, I had random and limited opportunities to observe effective teaching strategies of others and acquire new skills. Grade level meetings were held only when necessary to attend to administrative matters. The only real opportunities to gain new insights came from workshops and occasionally from a presenter at a school wide faculty meeting. The sabbatical period gave me many opportunities to learn from others. Naturally, a great deal was gained from the assignments given through each course. Many times when an assignment was due, members of the class were required to give an oral presentation. One professor even required as part of the assignment to provide handouts for the entire class on your particular book or topic. I found this to be of great worth. I discovered (or perhaps was reminded) that hearing and seeing products from other classmates gives one ideas in which to use and adapt to his/her own situation. The handouts collected gave each person a file of valuable resources to use in the future. It was also beneficial to hear from those who taught different subjects or grade levels. I was able to use this information to develop a broader view of how what is done in one classroom fits into other instructional areas and grade levels. This also helped me develop a deeper understanding of how what is taught to students builds on previous knowledge and supports future learning.

Presentation of Topics of Study

A second contributing theme that emerged during the sabbatical was the chance to present topics of study to peers and other adults. Prior to the sabbatical, this was something that caused me to experience feelings of anxiety. While standing in front of a class of children did not pose a threat, getting in front of a room full of adults was an intimidating experience for me and I avoided doing so whenever possible. During the sabbatical, I was given opportunities, through course work and a graduate assistantship, to give presentations to adults with encouragement and support from professors, other classmates, and the staff of the college. For instance, one of my professors allowed me to accompany her to a workshop and had me give a demonstration of a project I created using HyperStudio software that the professor was introducing during the workshop. During the sabbatical, I was also given the chance to teach a college level reading course which helped me to develop many skills in presenting to classes having students with a wide range of ages. In various courses, I was assigned microteaching episodes and book presentations that also provided occasions to make presentations to peers. Completing these assignments and taking advantage of these opportunities changed my perspective on my capabilities of presenting to adults. What used to be an unwelcome task became one that was enjoyable and pleasant. The encouragement from others and the number of opportunities to present topics of study in various courses helped me gain a sense of confidence and self reliance. This change has already helped me to discuss and plan

possible staff development topics and grade level assignments with others in my school for the current school year.

Providing for Individual Differences

This sabbatical leave also gave me the chance to gain instructional ideas and techniques to provide for the individual differences of students to use upon returning to the classroom. Teaching is continually changing and evolving, but often teachers become stagnant, following old familiar lesson plans and using the same classroom management techniques and organization year after year. Students come to the classroom today with diverse needs and various learning styles. Teachers need the skills necessary to address these needs, but often lack the time and energy to devote to the study of these and other topics since they are in the classroom full time. During the sabbatical, through coursework and other opportunities, I benefited from working with other educators to gain needed skills and techniques to deal with the myriad of students that come to the classroom. One such opportunity was the chance to give a science/math demonstration in an elementary school setting. Classes of first through fifth graders came on a rotation basis for the demonstration on polyhedrons. Each group presented challenges in giving directions that the children were able to understand so they could construct a polyhedron model and participate successfully in the activity.

Use of Technology

I found that increased use of technology in instruction was a major contributing factor that developed during the sabbatical leave. My cognate area of study was computer literacy, and the courses required for this cognate provided many ways in which technology could be used to enhance instruction and bring about educational reform in the classroom. I began the sabbatical with very little knowledge of computers and other educational technology in that I had little prior personal experience with technology. Furthermore, my professional knowledge prior to the sabbatical, was limited to a basic understanding of what the students in my classes had been doing when they went to the school's computer lab three times a week. The cognate courses taken during the sabbatical fostered skills in keyboarding as well as exposure to various types of software such as word processing, database, spreadsheets, and multimedia software. While software use was practiced, classroom applications were discussed, and I was challenged to find ways in which each particular type of software could be used in my classroom. Projects were developed and presented which could be used in the classroom. An example of this was my development of several "stacks" using HyperStudio software to teach concepts in reading and science. I not only gained from developing my own uses for the software, but there was a great deal of value gained from seeing other classmates' ideas. While working on projects, cooperation and helping each other was allowed and encouraged. This not only allowed me a chance to see, do, and learn more from my classmates, it also helped me to see that this could

create a major change in how students could learn in my classroom. I began to see through my own experiences that the students in my classes could produce more learning by allowing the students to work more cooperatively and for me to adopt a role as a facilitator to their learning.

Technology usage was promoted in more than the cognate courses. Assignments in several of the core area classes gave me opportunities to demonstrate uses of technology. This was especially beneficial to those in these core classes who had not been exposed to as much technology as me since they had chosen different cognates of study. For example, I chose to do a microteaching episode for a core class using a multimedia project created in one of the cognate courses. After the presentation, many classmates asked questions about the software and seemed interested in knowing how to create more uses for the software in their own classrooms.

Performance and Alternative Assessments

Developing alternative and performance assessments was another major theme of growth and development during my sabbatical. I had some previous experience with these types of assessment before entering graduate school. Some of the newer texts used in my school system came with alternative and performance assessments. These assessments came with all the directions and scoring rubrics needed. However, I chose not to use these assessments at the time because of several other factors involved, such as concern over management and time constraints. I was also concerned with

scheduling, making sure there was ample time for the assessment, yet accomplish all that was needed to be done for that particular week. Management was of significance since these types of assessment would require establishing new instructional and management routines. In several of the courses I took, alternative and performance assessments were developed and discussion of such concerns as previously mentioned helped me see the worth of these types of assessments. Creating these kinds of assessments by myself brought about a different perspective on their usage. Having the type of students that you teach in mind while developing such an assessment and the results you want to achieve give more value to the assessment, rather than a pre-packaged assessment. During class, opportunities were given to discuss our assessments with the professor and classmates which gave each of us a chance to give and receive assistance with management, time, and other topics of concern. I also benefited from learning various ways to score these types of assessments, such as using checklists and scoring rubrics.

Graduate Assistant Opportunities

Other experiences occurred during the sabbatical which also contributed to my growth and development. Many of these opportunities occurred as a result of the graduate assistant position. My first responsibility was to assist in the preparation of exhibits to be reviewed by the NCATE accreditation team during their visit to the university. I became immersed in many of the programs offered by the college as well

as seeing products created through these programs. I also assisted in the Office of the Dean where I was given the chance to express my perspective as a student in some areas where policies were being developed. I also worked closely with the doctoral studies department in organizing and creating a database and assisting with board meetings. Working within these areas gave me the desire to pursue a doctorate degree beginning within the next year.

In Defense of Sabbaticals

The opportunities granted through this leave of absence gave me many reasons to defend and support that teachers retain the right to professional growth and development sabbaticals. Many of the outcomes discussed in this paper could, to some degree, be accomplished while teaching full time. However, the chance for an extended period of time devoted solely to the pursuit of an advanced degree created the possibility for increased depth and breadth of knowledge. Perhaps the most worthwhile part of the sabbatical leave was being able to pursue these interests consistently while devoting all available time and energy to professional development. Working with peers and other educators from various schools and grade levels on a regular basis also allowed me to develop broader perspectives and a deeper understanding of my role in building upon my students' previous knowledge and supporting their future learning.

Return to Teaching

Since beginning the research for this paper, I have returned to teaching in my elementary school. The leave time was beneficial in enlightening me to new and different teaching strategies and techniques, especially since I have been given the challenge of implementing a full time inclusion classroom upon my return. Because of the sabbatical leave, I feel better equipped to deal with individual differences and am willing to try various methods of instruction which may be to the benefit of these special needs students. I have also planned units of instruction in science and social studies that I feel may better address the needs of my students. For example, I have used a unit I developed during the sabbatical on the scientific method as the initial unit in science instruction this year. Techniques of conflict resolution have also been implemented in the third grade social studies curriculum this year because of projects done during the sabbatical leave. As technology becomes available through additional classroom computers in the future, I feel prepared to manage and instruct my students in real world applications of technology usage. I also believe that I could be a factor in developing opportunities for the staff at my school to acquire new skills and gain insight from brainstorming topics of concern with each other.

Challenges and Frustrations

Many challenges and frustrations have occurred since my return to the classroom. The lack of available technology is one major concern. I feel prepared to

guide my students into the technology age, yet I lack most of the major hardware needed to do such a task. Scheduling has also been a main concern since working with special needs students requires a great deal of planning and coordination with the special education department. With new language arts and math content standards, additional challenges must be addressed to meet the needs of the students.

Despite these frustrations and challenges, the sabbatical leave has provided a network of fellow students and university faculty members that I have relied upon for the support and encouragement upon returning to the classroom. Other teachers have been relied upon as a support system for the demands placed upon me as an inclusion teacher. University staff have also been reliable sources of information and advice to help me cope with this new and trying situation.

Conclusion

The sabbatical was of great significance to me. I have felt a sense of change, growth, and have become a better teacher due to the experiences I participated in through the leave time. My knowledge has grown significantly due to the exposure to various teachers' methods and practices. My skills to deal with a vast array of teaching styles have improved significantly. Attitudes about education and students were broadened to accept and commit to educating all that are capable, whether identified as a special or regular education student in the regular setting. Flexibility and adaptability in management were also developed as part of the sabbatical leave.

Overall, the effect of the sabbatical has been one of change, growth, and development of skills and attitudes that make me feel a new sense of being able to come to the classroom as a stronger, more effective teacher than before.

References

Giroux, R.F. & Mezei, K.E.(1990). Exemplary practices in staff and program development. (ERIC Document Services Record No. ED 352 084)

Hawes, K. (1988).Time and expertise: A report of a one-year trial of a new professional arrangement for experienced and first year teachers. (ERIC Document Services Record No. ED 301 564)

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nassau, C.D. (1995). The seventh year stretch. American School Board Journal, 182 (11) , 30-32.

Oromaner, M. (1994). Putting the staff in staff development. (ERIC Document Services Record No. ED 371 792)

Stake, R. E. (1994). Case Studies In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). Handbook of qualitative research (pp.236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Sima, C.M.(1995). Reasons for and products of faculty sabbatical leaves. (ERIC Document Services Record No. ED 391 420)